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# Effects of Cubism on American Painting Since 1914

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EFFECTS OF CUBISM ON AMERICAN PAINTING  
SINCE 1914

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate Faculty  
Central Washington State College

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Education

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by  
Carl W. Brodin  
August, 1968

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Alexander H. Howard, Jr.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

The writer assumes that Cubism has had a significant effect on American Art. This investigation proposes to find and evaluate the influence Cubism has had on American painting since 1914. Many factors influence contemporary art and will influence future art. Among these are the demands of the contemporary world and the influence of the accumulated knowledge, practices, techniques, and methodology of our history.

It is difficult to say which of the influences is the most dominant in its effect on present artists. Whichever influence is chosen for research, others might seem to be equally important. However, this work must necessarily be limited to the research on one influence due to the scope of the task. It is to be hoped that this research will be put into context with explorations into other influences on current and future painting in America.

#### I. THE PROBLEM

##### Scope of the Problem

The problem will consist of establishing the beliefs, theories, and methodology of the Cubist movement as formulated by the members of a Parisian group of artists known as Le Groupe du Bateau-Lavoir. The

next step will be to attempt to discover these factors in representative paintings produced in America subsequent to 1914.

The final step will be to show the extent of the influences by reproducing selected American paintings, quoting current writers, and drawing conclusions.

### Limitations of the Study

An exhaustive treatise on the entire subject of Cubism, its history, its variations, and numerous ramifications is not necessary nor of value to this study. No such treatise will be developed. This study will be limited to discovering the essential characteristics of Cubism and their impact on selected representative American paintings produced in America since 1914 by nationally recognized artists and shown in reputable shows and reproduced in authoritative publications.

### Importance of the Study

The education of many prospective art teachers is not adequate for developing the insight and understanding necessary to the teaching of our complex contemporary art nor to prepare their students to understand and develop new trends or departures from the existing art. Too often the student teacher becomes knowledgeable only in an art form or theory currently in vogue during the limited period of his college training. The required Art History courses become exercises in rote memory of antiquities that seem valuable only as curiosities. This writer believes that the past



developments in art are not only of great interest in themselves but when viewed as developmental stages in a continually developing art, they put art into an understandable context.

The historic development in art is not a smooth transitional development from one level to another. However, the diverse and intertwining trends in art run reasonably deep and true. It is anticipated that the data collected and presented in this study will be useful when combined with other studies in a greater comprehension of current art. This study is important to the author because it has already contributed to his own sense of the historic context of current art.

## II. DEFINITION OF TERMS

### Analysis, Analytical

Analysis or analytical will be used in this paper to describe a quality of Cubism rather than to refer to a particular period in the development of Cubism.

### Sensational

As used in this paper, sensational refers to the sensate qualities of art.

### Synthetic, Synthesis

Synthetic or synthesis will be used in this paper to describe a quality of art rather than refer to a particular Cubistic development.

## CHAPTER II

### SEARCH OF THE LITERATURE

A search of the archives at Central Washington State College, Pacific Lutheran University, College of Puget Sound, Seattle University, The University of Washington, and Bibliography of Research, reveals no other Master's Thesis that deals with the same problem.

An excellent study has been made by Robert Rosenblum in the Department of Art and Archeology at Princeton University which has been published under the title of Cubism and Twentieth Century Art. Mr. Rosenblum has done some exhaustive research and has produced a great deal of documentation on Cubism, cubist paintings, and cubist sculpture. His relation of Cubism to further developments of painting remains somewhat sketchy. The conclusions he draws of the relationship between Cubism and contemporary painting will be dealt with in Chapters IV and V.

A number of excellent treatises on Cubism exist and some selected writings will be referred to in this paper. Most of these establish what Cubism is, what the Cubist theories and practices were, but little or no attempt has been made to show the developmental impact of Cubism on subsequent painting.

Some very important art histories have been written, but do little more than to explain the general aspects of Cubism and give the dates of

its existence with very little reference to any specific or lasting effects that Cubism has had on paintings and painters since its invention or discovery.

Many contemporary writers in current art magazines describe paintings and painting techniques in terms of the theories and techniques of the Cubists but make no reference to Cubism either because they do not recognize them as the theories propounded by the Cubists or else they leave them uncredited in the belief that the reading public will recognize the derivation of ideas or theories without any assistance.

This writer doubts that most readers will understand the derivation of the ideas and will fail to put the various trends and developments of painting into their historical context; hence, they will continue to view each separation in painting styles or theories as a sort of spontaneous occurrence and, therefore, difficult to understand.

## CHAPTER III

### PROCEDURE OF THE STUDY

The type of study will be the method of historical research.

The method of inquiry will be to ascertain the beliefs, theories, and methodology which formed the Cubist movement. Sources of these characteristics will be the published statements of Pablo Picasso, Guillaum Apollinaire, André Lhote; such art historians as Guy Habasque, Herbert Read, Gerald Hill, Robert Rosenblum, and H. W. Janson; current writers such as Sterling McIlhaney, Roger Hawthorn, Frederick Taubes, Alfred Warner, Seldon Rodman, Janice Lavoos, Ernest Watson, Henry Pitz, Edgar A. Whitney, and others.

The method will then be to trace the changes effected by Cubism's theories on selected post Cubist paintings produced in America.

These changes will be illustrated by reproductions of American post-cubist paintings. Through analyses and interpretations of the paintings, as well as through reference to the opinions of contemporary art critics and historians, conclusions will be presented with respect to the stated assumptions about the significance of Cubism on American painting since 1914.

## CHAPTER IV

### TREATMENT OF SELECTED WRITINGS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Cubism was a revolutionary movement in art affecting deeply the practice and teaching of art and design in America, but this debt to Cubism is often unjustly overlooked. Although Cubism, itself, lacked substance, its analytical methods--a basic innovation in art--are now being synthesized with a more profound view of the meaning and purposes of art.

Cubism, an art form stressing composition for its own sake with special emphasis on underlying geometrical structure, has had a number of champions, but has had many more detractors. The pro-Cubists, although very articulate in their claims, had no great philosophic basis to buttress their claims and validate their work as an important development. Although Cubism drew on historical influences in art for its conception, the intensely purist or analytical approach to Cubism by the Groupe du Bateau-Lavoir made of Cubism a very thin intellectual gruel that not only fascinated and repelled many artists and much of the public, but could not long support a sustained interest even among its founders. In spite of Cubism's rapid development, early maturity, and rapid decline, the Cubists developed certain features that have outlived the Cubist movement itself, to become strong factors in the development of a new

and broader concept of art that is still only in its formative, pre-emergent state. Because Cubism has contributed heavily to the recent developments in art, such as Expressionism, Surrealism, Pop Art, Op Art, Abstract Expressionism, Minimal Art, and many syntheses that have developed in between these more pure forms of art, it warrants a closer scrutiny and understanding than its foes were willing to accord it. We shall discover definitions of Cubism as stated by various art historians as well as from the writings of the Cubists, themselves.

During the calm years prior to World War I, a segment of mankind became preoccupied with experimentation and exploratory excursions into new areas of art, poetry, and prose. Under less favorable conditions, many of these experimental forms would have gone by without more than casual notice. However, this particular period of time gave rise to heated controversies about dubious health fads, new moral concepts, and such exploratory works as the new poetry of Gertrude Stein. Some of the more peculiar forms of art were elevated to a totally unjustified status of universal interest only to lose their importance in a relatively short time. Cubism was such an art form. The Cubist movement, which began in 1907, ended only seven years later in 1914 (1:67). But--that was not the end of its influence:

Few can have guessed at the time it was made that the picture which Pablo Picasso painted in the winter of 1906-1907, and which now is known as Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, was destined to have so decisive an effect on all modern painting (3:13).

Two men were primarily instrumental in the formation of the Cubistic theory. Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque were both searching for new techniques and methods of expression. Both were artists of great capability and promise, but were not well known in Paris. Both were searching for a vehicle to carry them to artistic fame. All that was needed was a catalyst to unite Braque and Picasso in their efforts. Such a catalyst was a new but influential art dealer, David Henry Kahnweiler, who introduced the two men, who had so much in common, to one another. How completely Picasso and Braque accomplished their purpose is well known. Picasso and Braque soon surrounded themselves with a group of able artists who were also in search of new methods and who became the creators of the Cubist movement. Herbert Read reports:

In the autumn of 1907 David Henry Kahnweiler . . . introduced (Picasso) to . . . Georges Braque . . . . The next year (1908) a group of painters and poets known as Groupe du Bateau-Lavoir . . . was formed in Montmartre. In addition to Braque and Picasso, it included Max Jacob, Marie Laurencin, Guillaume Apollinaire, André Salmon, Maurice Raynal, Juan Gris, and Gertrude and Leo Stein. In the same year Apollinaire introduced Fernand Léger . . . . There were several new recruits--Robert Delaunay, Albert Gleizes, August Herbin, Henri Le Fauconnier, André Lhote, Jean Metzinger, Francis Picabia, and the sculptor Alexander Archipenko (16:68-70).

All the members of the Groupe du Bateau-Lavoir contributed their considerable talents to the formation and promulgation of the Cubist theories.

Cubism put great emphasis on the structure of design and on the technique of method. The purist Cubist denied any meaning in his

work beyond these two factors. He felt that these were ample for the creation of works of art--a view not shared by his contemporaries who applied the derisive term "Cubism" to the movement.

The exponents of method, composition for its own sake, were consolidated under the name of Cubism. . . . (Cubism is) devoid of any meaning above and beyond the technical exhibition of process (2:218-219).

Because of the authority that must attach to the words of Guillaume Apollinaire, considerable space will be devoted to selected quotations translated from The Cubist Painter by Lionel Abel and edited by Robert Motherwell:

Real resemblance no longer has any importance since everything is sacrificed by the artist to truth . . . . The subject has little or no importance any more (1:10).

Thus we are moving towards an entirely new art which will stand, with respect to painting as envisaged heretofore, as music stands to literature.

In the same way the new painters will provide their admirers with artistic sensations by concentrating exclusively on the problem of creating harmony with unequal lights (1:11).

A man like Picasso studies an object as a surgeon dissects a cadaver . . . . This art of pure painting, if it succeeds in freeing itself from the art of the past, will not necessarily cause the latter to disappear; the development of music has not brought in its train the abandonment of the various genres of literature (1:11).

But it may be said that geometry is to the plastic arts what grammar is to the art of the writer. The painters have been led . . . to preoccupy themselves with . . . the fourth dimension (use of the word "fourth dimension" is obviously metaphorical; editor, Robert Motherwell) (1:12).



Greek art had a purely human conception of beauty. It took man as the measure of perfection. But the art of the new painters takes the infinite universe as its ideal, and it is to this ideal that we owe a new norm of the perfect, one which permits the painter to proportion objects in the degree of plasticity he desires them to be (1:12).

There are no collective errors or hoaxes in art; there are only various epochs and dissimilar schools. Even if the aims pursued by these schools are not equally elevated or equally pure, all are equally respectable, and according to the ideas one has of beauty, each artistic school is successively admired, despised, and admired once more.

The new school of painting is known as Cubism, a name first applied to it in the fall of 1908 in a spirit of derision by Henri Matisse who had just seen a picture of some houses whose cube-like appearance greatly struck him (1:13).

Cubism differs from the old schools of painting in that it aims, not at an art of imitation, but an art of conception, which tends to rise to the height of creation.

The new aesthetics were first elaborated in the mind of André Derain, but the most important and audacious works the movement at once produced were those of a great artist, Pablo Picasso, who must also be considered as one of its founders: his inventions corroborated by the good sense of George Braque, who exhibited a cubist picture at the Salon des Indépendants as early as 1908, were envisaged in the studies of Jean Metzinger, who exhibited the first Cubist portrait (a portrait of myself) at the Salon des Indépendants in 1910, and who in the same year managed to induce the jury of the Salon d'Automne to admit some Cubist paintings. It was also in 1910 that pictures by Robert Delaunay, Marie Laurencin, and LeFauconnier, who all belonged to the same school, were exhibited at the Independants (1:14).

Cézanne's last paintings and his water colors belong to Cubism, but Courbet is the father of the new painters; and André Derain . . . was the eldest of his beloved sons, for we find him at the beginning of the fauvist movement which was a kind of introduction to Cubism, and also at the beginnings of this great subjective movement (1:15).

From the plastic point of view, it might be argued that we can do without so much truth, but, having once appeared, this truth became necessary (1:20).

All authorities seemed agreed that Cubism was of limited application. The proponents of Cubism, themselves, were in agreement and finally deserted Cubism to further the search for a new art form in Surrealism and other new "isms" which were emerging during and after the war. H. W. Janson takes a slightly different view principally because he poses a slightly different frame of reference for Cubism:

It has always been easier to invent new labels than to create a movement in art that truly deserves a new name. Still we can not do without "isms" altogether . . . and local traditions have given way to international trends . . . we can distinguish three main currents . . . Expression, Abstraction, and fantasy. These currents are not mutually exclusive (7:512).

Janson places Cubism within his broad category of abstraction. However, one must feel that it is an advantage to consider Cubism as a separate entity because its characteristics were so carefully delineated that a natural separation seems to exist between it and most other abstract painting. It would seem from his use of the term that Janson also is of that opinion:

Cubism (1911) has become an abstract style purely in the Western sense. But its distance from observed reality has not significantly increased (7:522).

Cubism was influenced by the concepts of method and composition that had been built up by the work of all the masters of history. The evidence of this is substantiated by the fact that a number of

different artists are called "Father of Cubism" by various authorities.

If we are to accept these historians as authoritative, it must follow that the credit for the bases of Cubism are more diverse than each authority claims.

The definitive departure of Cubism from the norm in art lay in emphasizing the structural factor to the exclusion of the communicative interests usually found in the paintings of the masters, rather than the invention of a new process in art. This factor, combined with certain elements of African art, would tend to suggest that the rejection of "meaning" in a work of art is the only discovery which can be attributed to the Cubist with any validity. This assumption would be disputed by Guy Habasque:

Since there can be no question that the problem Picasso set himself and solved was that of a new method of rendering volumes on a flat surface, it is hard to see how those [African] sculptures could have really been of help. Moreover, the same problem had already been tackled [but not solved] by Cézanne notably in the works of his last ten years (3:20).

Picasso denied that he had become acquainted with African Negro art at the time he discovered the principles of Cubism:

He is even reported to have said: "Negro art? Never heard of it!" Obviously the remark was not meant to be taken literally; all he intended to convey was that he had never drawn inspiration from Negro sculpture. [However] This revelation of Negro art fully justified the line of research Picasso was then pursuing (3:20).

His denial, however, has been rejected by experts who trace his ideas directly to certain pieces of African art. They also felt another source

of the Cubistic idea was to be found in a modification of Cezanne's theories of composition. Herbert Read was one of the more reputable of the critics who held such views:

Picasso had discovered an art . . . essentially conceptual . . . and Cubism emerges as a fusion of the conceptual or rational element in African art with Cezanne's principle of "realization" of the motif . . . . Cezanne's pyramidal structure is replaced by vertical parallels . . . . Questions of derivation and resemblance are not . . . important; it is the new style that emerges from their complete fusion that was to be decisive for the whole future of Western art. . . . there was to be a strengthening of the African influence. The Woman in Yellow, . . . the Dancer, . . . and the Head . . . are all direct transpositions of the rationality of Negro sculpture into the pictorial compositions (16:68-70).

Read's statement forecast an influence that continues to affect Western art.

According to Read, the individual contributions made to Cubism by the individual members of the Groupe du Bateau-Lavoir are difficult to untangle, and it would be a mistake to look on Picasso as a dominating influence. Read says that the final style of Cubism is usually distinguished from the earliest phases of Cubism as analytical, but this term suggests an intellectual or methodical approach to painting which has been repudiated by both Picasso and Braque, who insisted on the essentially intuitive or sensational nature of their creative activity. However, Read says, "There is, of course, a very complete and consistent geometrical 'structurization' of the subject" (1:74-75). It would appear that the objective observer, Read, is more reliable than are the words

of the artists, themselves. Gerald Hill also disagrees with Picasso's own evaluation of Cubism. He feels that a Cubist painting does have meaning. He states, "Cubism does not deal with surface appearances, but rather it makes discoveries and statements about objects" (6:425). Just as his contemporaries did not share Picasso's views on method and application as an end in themselves, art historians disagree with Picasso on the style and analysis of Cubism. Such disagreement does not make Cubism less revolutionary.

Historians may disagree with Picasso, but they are agreed that an art revolution is continuing to take place--a revolution that is current and not completed. Herbert Read introduces his book by observing that it is not possible to write a comprehensive history of modern painting "due to the fact such history has not reached the end of its development" (1:7). Sterling McIlhaney points out the revolutionary aspects of modern art developments:

Then [World War I era], Paris, exciting post war headquarters of the talented and world weary, initiated thousands of young, and not-so-young, painters into the mysteries of the new and vital, in everything from Dada to Expressionism, and inspired a freedom of thought and action and general emotional abandonment that is almost legendary to a more sober time (12:54).

The art revolution spread to the new world with the return of artists among the American troops after the war. The United States received its impact with interest, reservations, distrust, hostility, and shock, as indicated by the following report on its effect on one of the

staunchest art associations in America:

Modernism reached Provincetown early when Richard Miller, John Noble, and Robert Ball returned from Paris after World War One. In 1920 John Noble stirred the art world with his impressionistic paintings, but already the term modernism was beginning to mean little. So many schools of art were beginning to emerge it was hard to tell what was really modern or just imitative. There were Cubists, Impressionists, Post impressionists, Realists, Surrealists, and all the other ists and isms.

At the opening of the 1926 annual exhibition, visitors were surprised, some shocked, to see a small Cubist picture hung in a prominent place (4:38-41).

Cubism holds an influential place in the art revolution for various reasons. First, the artist who embraced its theories was not only released from "saying" something with his work; he was released from the responsibility of having anything to say. Second, the public had learned to expect a "new model" every year and Cubism was new. Third, from a decorative standpoint, Cubism--with its stress on method and composition--was salable as room decorations. Fourth, and most important, the inept artist was able to hide his inability under the protection offered by this "ism" because of the developing confusion of both the general public and the supposed experts in the private galleries. This confusion was brought on by the profusion of new "isms" and a discrediting of traditional art that was not foreseen by Apollinaire as reported on page 10. The impact of Cubism on American painting has been underestimated because only a part of the influences were recognized while very often these were not even credited to Cubism, and

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GLORIOUS VICTORY OF THE SLOOP MARIA OIL 21x33 LYONEL FEININGER

other influences were unrecognized by the reporters and art critics.

Some examples of this will be given in this chapter.

Many new artists who have developed since 1914 were students under some of the members of the old Groupe du Bateau-Lavoir. It was natural that these students would learn the concepts of the Cubist school and incorporate them in their development as painters. Frederick Taubes describes one such student, John Barber, and quotes him as saying, "I have lived in Paris," which meant at one time studying with André Lhote

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LUNENBURG 11 WATERCOLOR & INK GABLES OIL FEININGER

20:30-35). Lyonel Feininger also recognized the Cubist influence in his own work. Alfred Werner quotes Feininger:

What we see has to go through the process of transformation and crystalization . . . . I have to destroy nature before I can begin to build her up again in my paintings.

[Werner continues about Feininger] This also the Cubists did, yet Feininger's work only superficially resembles the orthodox Cubists . . . . The Cubists would completely dissolve the actual elements of a scene in a design, whereas Feininger retained a reflection of the external world (23:27-62).



Considerable literature exists explaining styles of various contemporary painters. Too often the styles are correctly analyzed without crediting the Cubist derivation of those styles. Lovoos, in reporting an interview with Gerda With, does this in spite of the revealing nature of a quotation of Gerda With's:

I knew that . . . I needed to develop discipline, organization of picture planes, and the laws of composition and structure in painting . . . . I still prefer to avoid perspective and illusionary methods of creating space and atmosphere beyond the confines of the wall itself (8:20-23).

Selden Rodman is guilty of the same omission, or else lack of recognition, in describing the painting style of Franz Kline. "I asked him to describe, if he could, what distinguished the procedures of his kind of painting from that of artists in the past."

Procedure is the key word. The difference is that we don't begin with a definite sense of procedure. It's free association from the start to the finished state . . . painters like Rothko, Pollock, Still, perhaps in reaction to the tendency to analyze . . . "associate" with very little analysis (17:68-69).

Lovoos reports on the painting of Ruth Osgood:

. . . essentials are pared down to their simplest forms . . . I begin with a very abstract sketch . . . I've found that if I do a great many sketches . . . when I get to the actual painting the original conception is gone (9:86).

Lovoos reports,

Nature is Baumann's greatest source of inspiration, but every piece of work begins as a non-objective painting and then evolves structural form. He may create a realistic setup in his studio and abstract it. He claims the only mechanics he works on are structural qualities. For the rest, he is a painter of ideas (10:52)

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GABBY DISSENTS

OIL 20 X 36

by RUTH OSGOOD

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TORERO

OIL 24 X 34

by RUTH OSGOOD

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STILL LIFE WITH VIOLIN OIL 30X24 by KARL BAUMANN

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TWO-DIMENSIONAL STILL LIFE OIL 16X20 by KARL BAUMANN

With ample evidence to go on, Lovoos fails to put current artists into any understandable historical context.

Still Life With Violin and Two-Dimensional Still Life by Karl Baumann illustrate very clearly the impact still to be found in American painting from the Groupe du Bateau-Lavoir.

Lovoos' description of Antoyan's style makes no mention of Cubism, yet she speaks of sound organization, interlocking linear structure, and subtle adjustments of glowing color.

Antoyan is concerned with "message." He likes to paint ideas. Lovoos reports Antoyan's explanation, "I like to paint ideas even though I abstract [but] the message must be there."

The message is usually subtle as in the case of The Two Aggressors. To the average observer it is decorative subject matter; to him, "Aggressors" (11:46-51).

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PREPARATION      OIL      KERO ANTOYAN

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STILL LIFE WITH MELONS

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TROUBADOURS

OIL

ANTOYAN

SEARCH FOR PEACE

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MEDIEVAL CITY      OIL      46 X 48      by FRANCIS J. MEYERS

Francis J. Meyers discusses his own work and sees it in an historical context and is equally aware of the methodology he uses. He states,

A drawing may be an exact delineation of the outward appearance of a subject, or it may be abstracted to the point where there is little or no resemblance . . . . For me drawing is the soul of art . . . . Its great power is most evident in the work that has withstood the critical eye of the ages: that of Rembrandt, Rubens, Tiepolo, Degas, Ingres, Daumier, and others too numerous to mention (13:42-43).

Medieval City demonstrates Meyers' drawing concepts.

Laurence Schmeckebier illustrates a greater sense of the historical as he reports on the art of Gordon Steele. Steele, himself, is very much aware of the historical derivations of his work and mentions the debt he owes to the masters of the past. It is this sort of awareness that allows the development of a successful synthesis. Schmeckebier cites Steele:

Among the works of the Old Masters, Steele is a profound admirer of the eerie light and design effects of El Greco as seen in the paintings in Boston and Rochester, The Magnasco in Springfield, the strong light and form of the Boston Piero della Francesca, and the work of Winslow Homer. It is the solid form of the illustrator which he likes in the early Homer, and the romantic feeling in his later work Eight Bells, seen especially in the combination of form and light. Among the modern masters it is much the same quality translated into a stronger and more expressive form which he admires in the work of Georges Braque and Rico Lebrun, particularly the famous Crucifixion in the Syracuse University collection (19:80).

Whether or not Cubism's influences are recognized is of secondary importance to the considerable benefits it appears to have bestowed on contemporary painting. New developments incorporate Cubistic factors to advantage. This is apparent in the works of artists such as have been reprinted in this paper. A new integrity is evident in some of the new forms of art that are beginning to emerge. Some of these will be reviewed in Chapter V. This new integrity derives, in part, from the integrity of design that was inherent in Cubism. Much of the new art is attempting to re-integrate the desirable qualities of art--design and meaning--with



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STILL LIFE WITH GUITAR

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SIDEWALK MARKET

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CONSTRUCTION

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HIDE AND SEEK

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STEELE

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TENEMENT MADONA OIL STEELE

a degree of success. Cubism, although not receiving universal credit, has developed into a valuable aid to study for both the student and the advanced painter.

The product of the art revolution is beginning to emerge. A new group of artists have grown up on a diet of all the "isms." They are not shocked by them, so are able to see the values the new movements present with unclouded eyes. The modernisms in art have become so familiar to them that they are looking elsewhere--to tradition--for the novel idea. The so-called psychedelic art is, for instance, an ornate style stemming from both the Baroque and the Animism of early Celtic Christian art. The effect has been toward the formation of a gestalt theory of art (the blending of the best of the warring "isms" with tradition), best expressed by a contemporary critic:

There are signs of a new tide rising in American painting, an upward thrust . . . of young, yet maturing talents who have kept their poise . . . . They have toughened themselves by resisting the enticing but more enervating phases of abstract art and expressionism, but have incorporated into their work the fruitful gifts that the art revolution has brought . . . . Modernism's spurious promise of complete freedom has beckoned the eager, the ambitious, and the susceptible, but only the hardy and reflective have been able to understand that the exhilarating freedoms . . . must be earned and commanded through the severest discipline . . . . There are an increasing number of gifted and ripening personalities who, growing up with modernism . . . do not find it revolutionary . . . . They find abstraction a very valuable tool, but limited as an end in itself. They are aware of the meager emotions and the sentimentality of many of its results . . . . Many of our more tough-minded painters have become critical of emotions that drip and spill too readily . . . . Most of these men are also at home in the backgrounds of art. They are eager students of many cultures (14:36-40).

The American public deserves integrity in art. The people are disgusted with--and confused by--the paucity, the shallowness, the contradictions, the invective, and the intellectual dishonesty that has been heaped on them in the name of art for the past four decades. If new art forms with new integrity are emerging, it is none too soon. If an integrity is developing in art, part of the credit should go to Cubism which was such a tight discipline that its very existence depended on complete integrity. Many trained observers feel that this new valuable art is arriving now. One of them, Edgar A. Whitney, states his views very clearly as he discusses today's artist:

If he thinks improvisation is method, he is mistaken. If he contends that means are more important than ends, he is wrong. If he maintains that form is greater than content, he is in error. If he gives technique precedence over subject matter, he has put his cart before the horse. If he relies too much on the fact that a substance obeying its own laws does beautiful things and contributes no other values to his decoration, he is not even a good decorator. If he capitulates to current vogues, he has fallen into the trap of plagiarism. If he thinks avoiding cheap sentimentality in subject matter automatically avoids cheap aesthetics, he has blundered. If he states that rational discussion of theories of art is no help to experimental painting, he has shown us that he does not like to think and is guilty of self deceit. If he says artists finding greater values in esthetic fusion find no value in non-objective decoration, he is presumptuous and misinformed. If he thinks beauty and intelligence can be divorced, he believes in voodooism. If freedom is his obsession and he demands freedom from the world of things, he is merely a decorator.

But if his demand is for freedom in but not freedom from the expression of things pregnant with meaning, and he uses design principles as a means of fusing design and psychological values for the expression of meaningful things, he is right . . . .

Design principles are the esthetic basics. With them the artist can think, plan, build, organize, express himself and communicate. Knowledge of design principles fixes the stature of an artist (24:51-65).

Always, in the advance of human knowledge, new developments have challenged and discredited tradition. Often, the traditions have been re-affirmed and united with the new developments to obtain a greater truth and perspective. That type of re-integration may be occurring in art today.

Many of the dismembered parts are being re-assembled in the search for a greater truth, a greater portrayal of our world and our times. Pitz describes this in our contemporary artists:

To the new they bring invigoration from the old, for modernism has aged almost overnight and needs a transfusion. Some of our painters now walk familiarly in both worlds (14:37).

Cubism has influenced the development of better, more incisive methods of study. The great stress placed on analysis, method, and composition has been reflected in the improved art courses now offered in American art schools. The advanced student and the accomplished artist also take advantage of the study methods inherent in Cubism to analyze and build their compositions with the precepts of good design. Without rules and references, an artist could not correctly evaluate his own work. Watson emphasizes this point:

How should one pass judgment on an abstraction, how estimate its validity as a work of art? . . . Is it accountable

to the same criteria that apply to traditional art forms? . . . so-called design fundamentals . . . have merely been discovered through experience . . . they are eternally insistent in the art of all time (22:51).

Cubism is a part of the "experience" to which Watson refers. Where Cubism was guilty of stress, the "new" artist chooses to use all the lessons of the past without allowing any one value to be stressed to the exclusion of any desirable factor.

Four major conclusions might be drawn about the influence of Cubism on contemporary painting. First, Cubism was a contributing factor in creating the art revolution, but it has also contributed to resolving the issues that arose during the revolution. Second, Cubism permeated and affected the thinking of almost all of our contemporary artists. Third, Cubism has become one of the more constructive factors in recent art developments. Finally, the benefits we derive from the Cubist school outweigh the temporary confusions we have suffered and we forgive it for the inept abominations created in its name. Each of these points deserves a final word.

A period of revolution is a period of new conception and reformation of old concepts. Cubism, with its insistence on strict discipline, was one of the factors that finally acted as a governor to keep modern art from swinging completely away from the precepts of design that had been built through the centuries. These precepts were taught

and kept as a vital force in our influential schools of art. One of the most influential of these during the nineteen thirties was the WPA art classes, under the Federal Art Project, which owed no great allegiance to any particular tradition or convention. Schmeckebier quotes Massachusetts State Director of WPA, Harley Perkins:

The Federal art project of the Works Progress Administration is part of a great national program to encourage the artist and foster his progress through an epoch of social and economic adjustment.

Schmeckebier continues:

Historians would do well to review the impact of this epoch making program on artists . . . in these critical years when concepts . . . were in process of formation (19:42).

In any revolution, man's thinking becomes disrupted and is liable to investigate an unrewarding or fallacious tangent. Frederick Taubes cites the famed psychologist, C. G. Jung, who expressed the fear that this might be happening in art:

Great art till now has always derived from the myth, from the unconscious process of symbolization which continues through the ages and which, as the primordial manifestations of the human spirit, will continue to be the root of all creation in the future.

Taubes continues Jung's thought:

But the symbolic is one of the most abused terms in the modern esthetic vocabulary, for in the minds of our sententious critics it stands for nothing else except the recondite, the abstruse. Today, anything with an anti-realistic slant is glibly labeled symbolic which it indubitably is not (21:68).



Jung and Taubes refer to the concepts of Cubism--the overstressing of method and composition for its own sake. Many of today's artists are putting these concepts of Cubism into their proper context so that the lessons we can learn from Cubism do not conflict with the other values of art.

A tremendous development is occurring in art today; Cubism is one of the major contributing factors. Cubism is a re-affirmation of the structural values essential to the creation of a masterpiece. The analytical teachings of Cubism make the creative structure more understandable to contemporary artists. It has become a necessary chapter in the book of laws to govern the creative artist:

A half century of revolt and innovation in the arts will certainly bear fruit never dreamed of by its prophets. Portents are appearing of unguessed consequences. The victory of abstractionism, in its very moment of high triumph, already has a hollow sound . . . .

It begins to appear that one of the consequences of fifty years of frantic experiment may be the discovery that realism has only begun its explorations. The revolution gives strong signs of having revitalized the very thing it revolted against. Cross fertilization is taking place, and it may mean the gathering of new forces for a new age of painting. Facing the tangible with awakened eyes may lead to a new and lively dialogue between the concrete and the abstract, with a widely enriched vocabulary to supercede the abstractionist's dictionary of cliches . . . . But there is revolt too, counter revolt. It is a revolt against the easy trivialities of unguided self-expression, against transcendental promises and pipsqueak performance. It is a delusion with the quick and easy conquests of the painter's problems, with the value of gush and frenzy as suitable tools for deep exploration. It is a hunger for something that seems to be missing from our acres of sterile canvasses (15:30-32).

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SEGMENT OF SPAIN KAMIHIRA

LOWERING FROM THE CROSS KAMIHIRA

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The Cubistic influences have indeed been strong to have survived not only the art revolution, but to remain influential in what may be a counter revolution. The effect of Cubism on the thought processes of both artists and laymen has been considerable; however, it is still too early to come to conclusions as to the full value of this influence. It may be easier to ascertain Cubism's influence on some of the new developments in painting. This will be attempted in Chapter V. It would appear that Cubism has had a steadying effect on these later developments, and it has served to accentuate the importance of design and composition. Cubism may have died as a cohesive movement in 1914, but its influence lives on.

## CHAPTER V

### ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The objectivity of the data and opinions reported in this paper must remain open to question. It is very difficult and probably impossible for any writer to be completely objective about a subject that is almost entirely subjective. One must even remain subjective about the pictures reproduced in this paper. However, they are incorporated in this work as evidence to be interpreted by the reader and are as near to being objective data as it is possible to present.

"Little Known Bird of the Inner Eye" by Morris Graves, "Autumn Rhythm" by Jackson Pollock, and "Agony" by Arshile Gorky (6:123-4) represent an area of post-Cubist art which has not been discussed, but must be considered as having been affected by the prior existence of Cubism.

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AUTUMN RHYTHM

JACKSON POLLOCK

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AGONY

ARSHILE GORKY

The three seemingly unrelated paintings are found to have had an astonishingly similar ancestry. Arshile Gorky was under the influence of Picasso and the drawings of Ingres, particularly his disembodied line concept. He developed a fluid organic style highly influenced by Miro, who was himself influenced by Cubism. Jackson Pollock was a student of Thomas Hart Benton, but became influenced by the modern Mexican art and then came under the influence of the "Avant" art of Europe which had evolved from the earlier Cubist movement. He developed an interest in the primitive and the myth undoubtedly from his knowledge of Cubism. Pollock revolted against the demands of draftsmanship and fell wholeheartedly into the development of the "drip and drool" method of Abstract Expressionism. Morris Graves, also an Abstract Expressionist, worked as a Cubist, progressed into synthetic Cubism, and then broke with it to embrace Abstract Expressionism. A good case could be made of the effects of the study of Cubism on the development of Abstract Expressionism, but a negative relationship does exist when the demands of Cubism cause Pollock and Graves to revolt in favor of a less demanding, more expressive method of painting.

By looking at the trends at work in the fairly recent history of art, it may be easier to see what effect Cubism may have had on more recent and contemporary painting.

The heart rending and bitter battle waged by the Impressionists against the established academic control of art by the French Government established the right of the artist to express himself about his world rather than to be limited to an academic recreation of the world on canvas. The artist was now granted the privilege of becoming creative.

The Fauves reacted against the ethereal qualities inherent in Impressionism to create a world of wild color, but they retained all the privileges gained by the Impressionists including the sense of painting light that had been developed by the Impressionists.

The young artists surrounding Braque and Picasso revolted against the unbridled colors of the Fauves and the Impressionists' disregard for basic knowledge about composition and design. They reaffirmed the importance of design and wedded that to an honesty that demanded the painter treat the two-dimensional canvas with the stark concept of the two-dimensional design. The third and even the "fourth" dimension were portrayed strictly within the demanding confines of two-dimensionality. Subject matter had to be reduced from a level of importance to a point of no consequence in order that the over-riding consideration of design could dictate the form of the subject rather than the subject affecting the design. Thus artists were now allowed to be free from subject matter or meaning.

The Expressionists demanded a new freedom. Where the Impressionists declared their freedom to express themselves about an object by giving the "impression" rather than a duplication, the Abstract Expressionists now demanded the right to express themselves with a freedom from any objects at all. The Actionists took the even greater freedom of allowing a "happening" to occur on a canvas to become frozen in time. Now the artist was even released to the new freedom from technique, workmanship, or any other historic demand on the artist. What the artist now found himself faced with was a complete freedom to call himself "artist" because he met every qualification for the term when all qualifications were removed. Cubism was one of the liberating forces that worked toward this final freedom of the artist. Pop art was not a return to "realism" but was engineered to be a reality of trivia devoid of meaning to symbolize our meaningless existence. The "Found Object" school allows the finder to call himself "artist" because he is a mere appreciator of form. The artist has been reduced to the role of a critic when he has merely chosen one demolished automobile body to exhibit and relegates the others to the smelting furnace.

The new freedom has become a confusion to many artists and laymen alike. However, there are many who do not confuse change with progress. Many of these views were recorded in Chapter IV. It is time to review the findings of some of those critics.



Apollinaire believed that the new "pure music" art would live in amity with the accepted art of the past. One does find the continued existence of almost every major historic painting form, but many times it shows a new fusion with some of the newer developments in art which seem to have furnished a rejuvenation and an enhanced vitality that the original form may have lacked. Henry C. Pitz's remarks referring to this can be found on page 27 (14:36-40).

H. W. Janson expresses the view (see page 12) that it is an error to place too many confusing labels on art (7:512). He prefers to group Cubism under the general category of Abstraction which he visualizes as a main current or trend which includes most of the more recent developments in painting, such as Abstract Expressionism, Activism, Non-objectivism, and possibly even the newer "minimal" art. Janson would not agree with the view of Robert Rosenblum who feels that Cubism died in 1914, except that the cardinal works of Cubism must take their place in the museums beside the other masters of other techniques in spite of their alien-ness and irrelevancy (18:384).

It is apparent from this study that Cubism has had a significant effect on American painting since 1914.

## CHAPTER VI

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

By itself, this study is of very limited application in any attempt to put present or post 1914 painting into an understandable historic context. Cubism may have been of considerable influence in the ensuing development of painting, but it is only one of a number of very important influences. Each of the other influences should be studied and recorded. This study could then be used in conjunction with, or united with those studies to form a greater comprehension of later American painting.

No amount of research could possibly put every present painting experiment into an historic context. Nor is it necessary to do so. What is hoped for is an understanding of contemporary painting.

It is suggested that a study of the theories and practices of Impressionism, Fauvism, Magic-Realism, Surrealism, Expressionism, Abstract Expressionism, and Action Painting would be helpful as auxiliary studies when considered against a background of Renaissance and primitive art.

Another study might be made to discover the amount of synthesis existing between these various "isms" in present painting.

It might be supposed that the sum total of all of these studies might be generative in pointing to new avenues of experimentation for present and future painters to explore.

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## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

The letter to American Artist dated June 11, 1968, requesting permission to reprint certain prints in this paper , and the granting of that permission by Norman Kent, Editor, American Artist, is to be found on page 47.

The envelope carrying the reply postmarked New York, 25 Jun, PM, 1968, establishes the date permission for reprints was granted by American Artist, and is reproduced on page 47.

The reprints of all paintings shown in this paper were by courtesy of the American Artist in accordance with the permission granted on June 25, 1968.

The frontice page is the Picasso statue in the Chicago Civic Center and is a sketch by the writer.

*File*

~~General Manager,~~  
American Artist,

Please note:

Personal information redacted due to privacy concerns

Dear Sir:

I am engaged in doing a research paper entitled EFFECTS OF CUBISM ON AMERICAN ART SINCE 1914 as the thesis for a Master degree in Art Education at Central Washington State College.

I wish to receive your permission to make reprints of selected prints which have appeared in past issues of American Artist. These prints will be used to validate the prints made in the thesis paper.

The requested permission would apply only to reprints for the Master's thesis and would not be construed to extend to any other form of writing or re-publication.

The permission would pertain to work by Lionel Feininger, Gordon Steele, Kero Antoyan, Ruth Osgood, Richard Florsheim, Fred Messersmith, Jack Leonard, Ben Kamihira, Russel Hoban, Francis J. Meyers, Maurice Freed, John Sloan, Karl Bauman, Noel Daggett, Morris Graves, Arshile Gorky, and Jackson Pollock.

Thank you for an answer at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Carl W. Brodin

Please note:

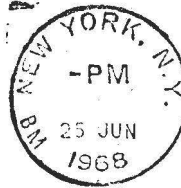
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reproduction.  
Very truly  
Norman Kent

*File*





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